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ABSTRACT

Traditional sex roles are changing in the areas of work, marriage, and family. Two studies were conducted to examine college students' actual expectations toward their own careers, marriages, and parenthood. In the first study, 167 college students completed a questionnaire in which they judged their past and expected future life employment status, marital status, parental status, and overall life satisfaction for eight age intervals that encompassed the lifespan. In the second study, 218 college students completed a questionnaire in which they indicated the exact age at which they expected to marry and have children, and their plans for employment while their own children were young. They also indicated at what age they thought these events should "best" happen. The results from the two studies suggest that the median age of marriage will continue to increase and that most respondents expect to delay marriage and parenthood. Both sexes reported expecting to marry and become parents at slightly later ages than the ages they indicated as being "best." There appeared to be a high degree of agreement between college males and females as to their expectations for the sexes' marital, parental, and career status. These expectations may have implications for the future birthrate, for childcare facilities, and for career practices. (NB)

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Marital, Parental, and Employment Expectations of Male and Female College Students[1]

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It has been generally acknowledged that traditional sex roles are changing. These changes have occurred mainly in the areas of work, marriage, and family. More and more women are entering the work force (Waite, 1981; Cuplan & Mazotta, 1982; Baruch & Rivers, 1983). Mason, Czajka and Arber (1976) suggest that these new role orientations of both males and females have led to a decrease in family size and a increase in the number of childless women and divorces. Gormly, Gormly, and Weiss (1987) examined responses of college students and found that people's orientation toward parenthood has changed in the last ten years. The primary reason their subjects gave for starting a family was to achieve adult status or social identity, whereas in Hoffman's (1972) study ten years earlier, the primary reason was to promote love and family ties.

The purpose of the present study was to examine college students' actual expectations toward their own careers, marriages and parenthood. This population was targeted because students of college age were expected to have fairly consolidated views of their own identities, and it was expected that many of them would be career oriented. It was predicted that for college students nearing graduation, both males and females would have similar attitudes about career, family and marriage issues.

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EXPERIMENT 1

In Experiment 1, a questionnaire was administered to 167 college students enrolled in upper-division general-education courses at a large state university. This questionnaire had students judge their past and expected-future life employment status, marital status, parental status, and overall life satisfaction for eight age-intervals that encompassed the lifespan: 0-5, 6-12, 13-18, 19-24, 25-36, 37-48, 49-65, and 65+ years of age.

Results from analyses of variance performed on the data showed that females expected to employed outside the home for fewer hours than did men, and particular hours employed differed depending on the age-interval judged. However, there was no interaction between gender and interval judged.

Fifteen percent of females expected to marry between 19 and 24 years of age, 73% between 25 and 36 years, and 6% between 37 and 48 years of age. Five percent of males expected to marry between 19 and 24 years of age, 69% between 25 and 36 years, and 15% between 37 and 48 years of age. An analysis of variance on this data showed that females expected to marry at a significantly younger age-interval than did males.

Six percent of females expected to become mothers between the ages of 19 and 24, 62% between 25 and 36 years, and 21% between 37 and 48 years. Eight percent of females (vs. 10 percent of males) did not expect to have children. Three percent of males expected to become fathers between the ages of 19 and 24 years, 35% between 25 and 36 years, 46% between 37 and 48 years, and 6% at older ages. An analysis of variance on this data showed females expected to become parents at a significantly younger age-interval than did males.

An analysis of variance on the life satisfaction ratings throughout the lifespan indicated that gender of respondent was not a significant variable, nor did it interact with age-interval judged. Both sexes expected the years between 25 and 48 to be most positive and judged the adolescent years from 13 to 18 as being the most negative. Old age, described as 65+ years, was judged no differently than age-intervals 6-12 and 18-24.

EXPERIMENT 2

In Experiment 2, a questionnaire was administered to 218 college students enrolled in upper-division general-education courses at a large state university. Their median age was 22 and the majority described themselves as middle class in socioeconomic status. Thirty-nine percent of the subjects had at least one parent who was divorced; 34% had a mother who worked full-time outside the home when they were less than six years of age; 57% had mothers who worked full-time outside the home when they were between 6 and 16 years of age. This questionnaire had students indicate the exact ages they expected to marry, have children, and their plans for employment while their own children were young. Students also indicated the age they thought as "best" for each sex to marry and become parents and how many children of each gender they preferred.

Analysis of variance on the marital age data indicated that all subjects thought females (25.2 years) should "best" marry at a younger age than males (27.2 years); however, both sexes expected to marry at a later age (+1.1 years) than they themselves listed as the "best" age.

Analyses of variance on the parental age data indicated that female students thought that the best ages for female parenthood (27.4 years) and male parenthood (29.4 years) to be one year older than did males (26.4 and 28.7 years, respectively). Again, both sexes expected to become parents about one year later than they themselves listed as the "best age". Only seven percent of respondents did not expect to become parents. Analyses of variance on the preferred gender of children by respondents indicated that both sexes significantly preferred more male than female offspring (1.33 boys vs. 1.19 girls). However, by far, the preferred number of children by most respondents (56%) was 2, 1 boy and 1 girl.

Analyses of covariance on the expected employment data of students as parents-to-be, indicated hours of employment (1 = full time, 2 = part time, 3 = not at all) varied as a function of Age of Children (less than 2 years, from 2 through 6 years), and Gender of Parent (mother,

father). Both Age of Children and Gender of Parent were significant main effects, and these two factors also significantly interacted. Gender of Respondent did not affect these ratings. Both sexes expected their children's father to work full-time (M = 1.04) regardless of the child's age, but the mother would be more likely to work part-time when the child was less than 2 years-old (M = 2.2; 15% full-time, 51% part-time, 33% not at all) and part-time when the child was between 2 through 6 years of age (M = 1.75; 38% full-time, 49% part-time, 13% not at all). In addition, the respondents' reports of their own mothers' employment histories while they were children, were found to be significantly related to their projected-employment as future parents.

Discussion

These results suggest that the median age of marriage will continue to increase. In a survey conducted by the Bureau of the Census in 1982, the median age at first marriage for men was 25.2 years, and 22.5 years for women. For college students in the present study, the males' expected mean age at first marriage was 28.3 years, and 26.3 years for women. On the average, both sexes expected to have their first child approximately one year later. This delay in age at first marriage and childbearing is consistent with other studies that have found that women with higher educational attainment are more likely to delay parenthood (Marini, 1984). However, this present study shows that men's age of marriage and parenthood is also delayed.

Overall, these results suggest a high degree of agreement between college males and females, as to their expectations for the sexes' marital, parental, and career status. In fact, the only difference found was in the one year later age-expectations of when females project themselves and their mates to become parents.

The fact that both sexes expect to marry and become parents at slightly later ages than they indicated as being "best", however, could have far-reaching consequences. This difference between "best" age and "planned" age suggests that college students have already planned to delay their marriage and parental options, perhaps because of present pressures to become

educated and to establish a career. This could indicate that when other future pressures in their careers or personal lives occur, they may continue to delay even further their marital and parental plans. Such delaying could result, according to Thornton (1984) in nearly 30 percent of young white women ending up childless. This would have a significant lowering effect on the U.S. birthrate.

Data from 1982 indicates that 49% of married mothers of preschool children work (Thornton, 1984). This survey suggests that 87% of our college-educated students expect that the mother of their preschool offspring will be in the workforce at least on a part-time basis. This data has large implications for the necessity for more childcare facilities and also suggests a likely willingness on the part of the newly-educated populace to provide financially for its implementation. Further, the positive relationship found between mother's employment and offsprings' expected future employment when they reach parenthood suggests that this trend toward greater maternal employment will increase even more in the next generation.

The results of this study also suggest that whereas both males and females are generally in agreement about when to marry, when to start a family, and how many children they want, it is still expected by both male and female college students that it is the woman who will cut down on her working hours to care for any offspring. Anselmi and Smith (1984) suggest that as women actually participate in the more traditionally male dominated fields, "they will come to adopt the more traditional male values" p. 5.

It may be that when these college-educated men and women enter the job market and discover that childless women executives tend to earn 15 to 20 percent more than mothers with the same work experience (Bloom, 1986), and that part-time work for educated professionals is difficult to find, either they will jointly push toward a change in society's hiring practices or these young professionals (both male and female) will have to change their expectations about "having it all", both careers and parenthood.

It is acknowledged that the surveys used in the present study focused on expectations

rather than on actual behavior, and that behavior may not follow directly from expectations made several years beforehand. But to the extent that attitudes have been useful in assessing at least the direction of intended behavior, it is believed that these present findings are meaningful. Likewise, the subject population used in this study was limited with respect to age, location, and background. Further study needs to be done to determine whether the results found in this study are representative of the U.S. population as a whole.

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